



NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE



Brandon Southall / NMFS



Rob DiGiovanni / NEFSC

Family: Ziphiidae
Population: unknown
Status: Data Deficient
Length: 13 – 42 feet
Weight: 1,800 – 24,000 lbs

Beaked Whales (*Mesoplodon* sp. & *Ziphius* sp.)

Description

Beaked whales, or ziphiids, are deep divers that spend very little time near the surface making it challenging to observe them at sea. As a result of their low profile, many species are known only from stranded specimens. In particular, within the genus *Mesoplodon*, there are four species of beaked whales found in the northwest Atlantic. These include; True's beaked whale (*Mesoplodon mirus*), Gervais beaked whale (*M. europaeus*), Blainville's beaked whale (*M. densirostris*), and Sowerby's or North Sea beaked whale (*M. bidens*). Within the genus *Ziphius*, there is one species of beaked whale in the northwest Atlantic: Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*). Beaked whales are medium-sized with a small curved dorsal fin about two-thirds of the way down on their back, have a pair of grooves on their throat, and "flipper pockets," which are slight depressions on the body into which flippers can be tucked. Males can be easily distinguished by a pair of large tusk-like teeth that erupt from their lower jaw, and are apparently used in fighting with other males. Individuals (especially males) accumulate scars and scratches with age.

Habitat and Distribution

Beaked whales occur in deep offshore waters worldwide – often near banks, canyons, seamounts, and continental slopes. Migration patterns are unknown.

Sounds

Beaked whales use echolocation on their deep dives while foraging. Not much is known about their vocalizations as they are difficult to detect and record.

Feeding

Beaked whales dive deep where they use suction to feed on small fish and squid.

Threats

Beaked whales are threatened by entanglement in fishing gear, ship strikes, and occasional hunting. Recent strandings due to acoustic trauma have been associated with active sonar during naval exercises.

Fun Fact

The erupted tusk-like teeth of adult males are sometimes covered in barnacles!